TRANSCRIPT: Miscellaneous Myths: Fionn Mac Cumhaill
(in case you can’t watch the video on slide 32)

It's a well-known fact that Irish mythology has its fair share of fighters.
Just look at Cú Chulainn for one of the prime examples.
But in the foggy annals of Gaelic mythohistory, one rebel rises above the rest
as a shining example of peak awesome almost by virtue of name alone.
Leader of the Fianna, magically gifted with all the world's wisdom, and fortuitously granted a name befitting his coolness.
This is the story of Finn McCool.
Yeah, when the name like that, how could he NOT be a hero.
Now Finn's origins are a little complicated, but it's a fairly familiar story to us modern audiences.
Stop me if you've heard this one.
A sellsword mercenary captain falls in love with the beautiful daughter of a powerful wizard.
But the father disapproves of their union.
Yeah, Cool, leader of the Fianna - which is a ragtag band of warriors - falls in love with Miurne, daughter of Tadhg.
But Tadhg - himself a powerful druid - knows through some mystic whatever that Cool will bring about his downfall.
So when Cool comes calling for Miurne's hand, Tadhg turns him away.
The story is unclear on Miurne's thoughts on the matter, but long story short, Cool kidnaps her and sparks all-out war between the Fianna and the High King, who Tadhg had asked for help.
Cool is killed in the battle by this guy Goll Mac Morna, but Miurne is already pregnant with Cool's son, and Tadhg rejects her as a result, and orders her to be burned.
Luckily for everyone involved, the High King ISN'T a total butt, and puts Miurne under his protection.
Miurne gives birth to a son, who she gives to his aunt, the druidess Bodhmall and her companion the warrior woman Liath Luachra.
So the kid, whose given name is Diemne, grows up with fighter mom and druid mom, who teach him the ways of fighting and druiding. And before you ask, every source I found was very nonspecific about the nature of Bodhmall and Liath's relationship, so interpret it however you want.
So Diemne was raised in secret, mostly because a metric boatload of warriors are waiting to gain mad prestige by murdering the son of the famous Cool.
But after a childhood of wacky shenanigans, he starts enlisting under various kings, who all end up figuring out his true identity.
Because only the son of the legendary Cool could be so all-around awesome dude.
Also somewhere along the line people start calling him Finn, which just means "light-haired".
Some versions of the myth say the nickname got started when his hair turned prematurely white, while in others it's just because he didn't tell people his name, so they started calling him "blondie".
Anyway, eventually, Finn runs into this dude Finnegas, a druid and poet who spent seven years trying to catch the hilariously named Salmon of Wisdom, in the hopes that it will grant him the aforementioned wisdom.
Coincidentally, the moment Finn shows up, he manages to catch it, and orders Finn to watch the salmon while it cooks, but not to eat any of it, while Finnegas runs off and does something somewhere else.
But while Finn is tending the salmon, he accidentally burns his thumb on the grease, and sticks in his mouth to cool.
And seeing as this counts as consumption of some of the Salmon, this immediately grants him the infinite wisdom of the Salmon of Wisdom.
Finnegas returns, notices Finn looking a little smarter than before, and realizing what happened, lets Finn eat the rest of the salmon too.

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This grants Finn all the world's wisdom, but at a price. He can only access it by sucking his thumb.
Anyway, Finn goes to the High King - a different one than the one who fought his dad - to see about joining the Fianna.
But things are a little awkward, because the current leader of the Fianna is Goll, the man who KILLED Cool way back when. So obviously nobody's too keen on having his son join the party.
But fortunately Finn is given a chance to prove himself. See for the past 23 years, every Samhain [basically the Pagan Day of the Dead that always falls on Halloween], this fairy prince, Aillen Mac Midna, would put everyone to sleep with his music and then burn the roof of the High King's stronghold.
Finn promises the high king that he'll defeat Aillen, and in doing so prove that he deserves to lead the Fianna.
Luckily, Finn happens to have inherited a crane skin bag of magical weapons from Cool, and uses a magic red-hot spear to stay awake during the magical serenade by STABBING HIMSELF IN THE FACE.
Then, after a suitably epic fight, Finn kills Aillen, and earns the respect of the high king and the Fianna.
Goll willingly steps down, and Finn becomes the leader of the Fianna.
Now let's talk about how Finn gets hitched. So he's out hunting one day, right?
And he spots this gorgeous deer.
Which his hounds refuse to let him kill.
Intrigued, Finn leads the deer back to his home, whereupon it turns into a beautiful woman named Sadhbh, who was turned into a deer by the evil Fer Doirich.
All right, before you jump up my butt about this, let me talk about why it is literally impossible for me to get these names right.
The simplest reason is that there is no one Irish-Gaelic dialect.
There are at least three: Munster, Connacht, and Ulster. All pronounce stuff differently, and even the grammar varies from region to region.
Getting it right In one region usually means getting it wrong in at least one other.
For this name alone, I found like 4 different readings.
And I also found that everyone gets really MAD if you use the one that they don't.
So, you know, if you're, I don't know, composing an angry comment right now, just be aware that I have almost certainly heard it all before.
Moving on, related to that dialect problem, the simple fact is that Gaelic is not optimized for the Latin alphabet.
Most obviously, basic building blocks sounds that should by all rights be single symbols are frequently represented by pairs of letters, because there's no single letter that corresponds to them.
Beyond that, Gaelic words are hypothetically spelled phonetically.
But the unfortunate fact is that those spellings can then be read a bunch of different ways, even if you DO have an intuitive understanding of the phonetic rules.
Which I do NOT.
Because I am BAD at this.
So yeah alright.
Anyway, Fer Doirich, who is a member of the Tuatha De Dannan, the pre-christian gods of Ireland, turned Sadhbh into a deer, and Finn's house somehow turns her back.
So Finn and Sadhbh get married, and Sadhbh ends up pregnant.
But one day, while Finn is out doing his Fianna thing, Sadhbh is lured out of the house by what turns out to be Fer Doirich.
Who turns her into a deer again. Finn returns home to find the house empty, and searches the woods for Sadhbh to no avail.

But seven years later, Finn finds a young boy wandering in the woods, spots a resemblance to his missing wife, and realizes that this kid is his son.
So he names him Oisin and starts raising him.
Oisin becomes one of the raddest students in the Fianna, and is an all-around cool guy.
Now, as a culture hero, Finn has a ton of miscellaneous myths about himself, but we basically covered all the major bases.
But before I wrap this up, let's take a hot minute and talk about a literary motif most commonly associated with King Arthur, but also rather famously applies here.
The King in the Mountain.
In this motif, some great hero, rather than dying, instead bunkers down for a prolonged nap in some local geographical feature, only to awaken in their homelands greatest time of need, or when some other conditions are met.
For example, Merlin is supposedly sealed in an oak tree, Charlemagne is said to be in the Untersberg, the Golem of Prague is supposed to be in the attic of the Old New Synagogue, and Väinämöinen, the hero of the Kalevala, just kind of sailed off into the sunset, promising to return in Finland's greatest hour of need.
Man, if even half of these legends are true, the apocalypse is gonna be WAY more interesting than we give it credit for.
Anyway, this king of the mountain thing also applies to Finn and the Fianna, who are said to be sleeping in a cave somewhere in Ireland, only to awaken when the Dord Fiann, hunting horn of the Fianna, is sounded three times, whereupon they'll defend Ireland in its greatest time of need. As one does.
Gnarly!